

Arts Backed as Aid For Troubled Youths

By RALPH BLUMENTHAL

In a high-level plug for community arts programs for young people, a White House panel has prepared a report documenting how such programs can foster creative enrichment and academic improvement. The report, "Coming Up Taller," by the President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities, says that "safe havens" of music, theater, dance and visual arts programs have proved "particularly potent" in stemming violence and drug abuse and in keeping students from dropping out of school. It is to be ceremonially released this afternoon at the White House by Hillary Rodham Clinton, the actor Richard Dreyfuss, and Jane Alexander, chairwoman of the National Endowment for the Arts, among others.

The committee reviewed 218 programs in 36 states and the District of Columbia, including a California program, "Sentenced to the Stage," in which juvenile offenders in the Los Angeles area joined drama and dance workshops as a condition of their probation, and a Manhattan media workshop, the Educational Video Center, where high school students shoot programs for their own show, "YO-TV." Not all programs in the country made the report.

The executive director of the committee, Ellen McCulloch-Lovell, called the report the first of its kind. "Nobody and certainly not a Presidential-level committee has ever taken 14 months to study what's happening on a community level," she said.

The report does not offer detailed evidence of just how the arts enhance learning, although it includes references to earlier studies. Rather, the report seems aimed at strengthening the programs and crediting those, from government officials to artists and volunteers, who have supported them — and sometimes, as Ms. Lovell put it, "have gotten bashed for assaulting our values." Indeed, it allows some of the program directors to define their own programs.

Ms. Lovell said that the report drew on previous studies for the President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities that found the arts playing a crucial part in children's educational development. The report cited "correlations between

A White House study finds cultural programs can help stem crime.

arts education and improvements in academic performance and standardized test scores, increases in student attendance and decreases in school dropout rates."

But she said that many of the programs themselves were so short of funds that they had not been able to study their own impact. "We need to do more research on why the programs work," Ms. Lovell said.

Among the examples in the report is a visual arts program started by artists in Birmingham, Ala., for children who were hanging around their art studios. In Somerville, Mass., a television director who met local youths began teaching them to document their neighborhood with video cameras. In Pittsburgh, the Manchester Craftsmen's Guild offers young people an apprenticeship training program in ceramics, computer imaging, drawing and photography; many of the participants go on to college.

Carlos Uribe, director of programs for teen-agers at the Center for Contemporary Arts in Santa Fe, N.M., is cited in the report for encouraging children to draw "It doesn't have to be the greatest piece of artwork," he said. "You can throw it away as soon as you do it. But for the moment, you are ultimately free, and there's almost no place on this planet where you can experience that."